

Big Sinus Had Correct Formula For Late Winter: Be Quiet As Possible

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Everybody in the Shortgrass Country knows what the score is from now till spring. Bright-eyed kids and old grey whiskers alike are aware that from Ground Hog Eve to the advent of warm weather is the toughest part of our year. This has always been the case. Back in Indian times, this land was plagued by terrible late-winter seasons. The redmen used to barely make it from their New Year to what they had to make do for May Pole Day. (The Indians had no official holidays. If they happened to have the price of a jug of lodge brew, they figured that was sufficient justification for a celebration. That's one reason the Indians ended up being called savages: They didn't plan their drunks.)

Every year the tribes suffered something awful. The buffalo and deer would get so poor that the squaws couldn't wring a cup of soup from 40 head. The ground squirrels and possums would become so scarce that a four-mile trapline wouldn't produce enough game for a decent omelet, let alone a stew.

To further sadden the scene, the exchange rate of wampum would invariably fall to pieces during this period. Braves of great wealth were forced to tighten their pouch strings. Squaws found it necessary to cut their wigwam expenses. The chiefs went around wearing tattered war bonnets that normally wouldn't have been worn to a conclave with the "bug eating" tribes. All through the villages, there was a pall of gloom as dark as the bottom of a badger's den.

As with any other period of human strife, these annual depressions caused the chiefs and wisemen to launch bitter verbal attacks against famines. The big shots would hold feasts, then denounce poverty in terms that weren't fit for mixed company; and, as the food roasted on the embers, the leaders would design great plans to alleviate the suffering of the masses.

From one of these meetings a witch doctor named Big Sinus (he was a nose and throat specialist) developed a solution to the problem. He decided that if the people were ever going to pass through late winter without being hungry, they would have to learn to remain quiet. Using a calorie chart of his own invention, he pointed out that all the wailing and carrying-on in the tribe was burning up far too much energy — if the citizens would stay home and keep still, a diet of a few pickled beetles and dried lizards would be sufficient to quell their hunger pangs.

To clinch his argument, he also contended that most of the unrest was due to the tribesmen's wild imaginations. As he told the council, there's nothing in the medical books that says a man needs to eat three meals every day.

Big Sinus' plan won full support of the leaders. Though his program wasn't overly popular with the publicans, the big shots were pleased to clear the matter from the docket and get on with such important business as raising and extending the tax rates.

In our times, the ordinary citizen is better prepared to accept the terrors of winter's waning months. Oh, a few hombres get to gnashing their teeth if spring rains holds off until, say mid-August. Once or twice, I've seen a banker or two grow mighty grim when we had to feed an extra three months.

But for the most part, we natives out here take whatever comes, because we all know that Washington and the State House are filled with forerunners of Big Sinus who know what's best for us in the long run.